

Calls for climate action rising after election

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OTTAWA—A coalition of climate change advocates is urging Canada's new minority Parliament to promptly develop a clear, effective and coherent strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent escalating anxiety in the oilpatch from impeding urgently needed progress.

Climate Action Network Canada, along with representatives from Unifor, Leadnow, Greenpeace and 350.org, say climate was the biggest factor in the recent federal election, and those parties that ran on climate platforms owe it to voters to organize a co-ordinated response.

"This was truly Canada's first climate election and it demands a significant shift in the politics surrounding climate action in Canada," said Catherine Abreu, executive director of Climate Action Network Canada.

For too long, climate action has been a political football in a partisan game, but voters sent the message last month they expect that to change, Abreu told a news conference Friday in Ottawa. The Liberals, NDP, Green and Bloc Québécois parties all had overlapping promises on climate change, which ought to make co-operating on the file easier, she added.

Logan McIntosh, executive director of Leadnow, said there was some disappointment earlier this week when NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh declared pharmacare, not climate change, as his top priority for lobbying the Liberals when Parliament resumes.

"We are facing a climate emergency and we want to see all the political parties put climate change at the top of their agenda," McIntosh said.

The fallout from the Oct. 21 vote saw Justin Trudeau's Liberals reduced to a minority government, with no MPs at all from Alberta and Saskatchewan - provinces where anxiety about the economic effect of combating climate change is highest and where voters overwhelmingly backed the Conservatives, a party with no plans to reduce domestic oil and gas production.

Abreu said politicians have been using those anxieties as "a political weapon" and interpreting the fears as a rejection of climate action.

"Instead of using the anxiety that workers are expressing as they face a series of challenges as a reason to stall climate action, we need to use climate action as an opportunity to build those new jobs and those new economic sectors that will ensure workers and communities are safe into the future."

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Ken Bondy, national representative for Unifor, which represents more than 11,000 oil and gas workers in almost every province, said the union has heard clearly from its membership that climate change is an issue for them, but they are also concerned about their jobs.

"We need a balanced approach to taking climate action and just transition for workers that may be affected," said Bondy.

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